

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L QUEBEC 0152

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SUBJECT: ELECTORAL OUTLOOK FOR SOCIAL CREDIT PARTY

1. THE SOCIAL CREDIT PARTY MAY WELL LOSE GROUND IN THE NEXT FEDERAL ELECTIONS, ACCORDING TO INFORMED SOURCES HERE. RECENT CONVERSATIONS WITH FABIEN ROY, CURRENTLY SITTING AS AN INDEPENDENT IN QUEBEC'S NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, CAMIL SAMSON, LEADER AND SOLE SITTING REPRESENTATIVE OF THE PROVINCIAL RALLIEMENT CREDITISTE, AND ROBERT POIRIER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE QUEBEC BRANCH OF THE FEDERAL LIBERAL PARTY. HAVE RESULTED IN ESTIMATES THAT SOCREDs MAY HANG ONTO AS MANY AS 7 SEATS (ROY), TO AS FEW AS 3 OR 4 (SAMSON AND POIRIER). THE SOCREDs CURRENTLY HAVE EIGHT FEDERAL SEATS, ALL FROM QUEBEC.

2. THE QUEBEC WING OF THE PARTY HAS BEEN RIVEN WITH DISSENSION FOR MONTHS OVER WHETHER TO CONTINUE TO MAKE A GO OF IT AS A TRULY NATIONAL PARTY OR WHETHER TO COME OUT OPENLY AS A PURELY REGIONAL PARTY DEFENDING QUEBEC'S INTERESTS IN OTTAWA. SEVERAL DEPUTIES, NOTABLY ARMAND CAOUTTE AND RENE MATTE, FAVOR THE LATTER COURSE AND HAD OF LATE BEEN URGING FABIEN ROY TO CONTEST THE LEADERSHIP AND TO RUN IN THE BEAUCE RIDING IN THE NEXT ELECTION. ROY HAD EXPRESSED STRONG INTEREST ON THE CONDITION THAT THE

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LEADERSHIP CONVENTION BE MOVED FROM WINNIPEG TO OTTAWA OR QUEBEC. THE PARTY EVENTUALLY REFUSED TO GO ALONG, ALTHOUGH ROY APPARENTLY KEPT HIS HOPES UP RIGHT UP TO CONVENTION TIME LAST WEEKEND. CAOUPETTE RESIGNED FROM THE INTERIM LEADERSHIP AND MATTE WITHDREW FROM THE PARTY ALTOGETHER OVER THE ISSUE. AS FOR ROY, HE TOLD THE PRESS LAST FRIDAY THAT HE HAS BROKEN OFF TALKS WITH THE PARTY AND WOULD NOT ACCEPT A POST AS DEPUTY LEADER.

3. THE ROY BUSINESS IS INTERESTING PRIMARILY BECAUSE BOTH POIRIER AND SAMSON TOLD US THAT ROY REPRESENTED THE ONLY CHANCE FOR THE SOCREDS TO AVOID A DEBACLE IN THE UPCOMING ELECTION. IF ROY HAD RUN, THEY SAID, HE WOULD HAVE TAKEN BEAUCE FOR SURE AND WOULD PROBABLY HAVE SWUNG SEVERAL ADJACENT RIDINGS INTO THE SOCRED COLUMN. ROY FAVORS AUTONOMY FOR QUEBEC AND THE OTHER CANADIAN PROVINCES, AND WOULD REPORTEDLY HAVE BROUGHT WITH HIM THE BACKING OF THE PARTI QUEBECOIS ORGANIZATION, EAGER TO DELIVER A BLOW TO THE LIBERALS, IN A NUMBER OF RURAL RIDINGS. POIRIER, WHO SPOKE TO US BEFORE ROY DECIDED NOT TO RUN, SAID THAT HE WAS "VERY UNEASY" ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF A ROY CANDIDACY AND OPINED THAT THE SOCREDS WERE FAR MORE DANGEROUS TO HIS PARTY IN QUEBEC THAN THE PROGRESSIVES CONSERVATIVES. THE PC'S, HE SAID, WILL GET NO MORE THAN TWO SEATS IN THE PROVINCE. IN FACT, HE WOULD BE PLEASED SEEING PC RUN STRONGEST POSSIBLE CANDIDATES IN EASTERN QUEBEC BECAUSE THEY WOULD CUT INTO THE SOCRED RATHER THAN LIBERAL VOTE AND THEREBY FACILITATE THE LIBERAL VICTORY.

4. COMMENT: CURRENT POPULAR SUPPORT FOR THE SOCREDS IN QUEBEC IS DIFFICULT TO MEASURE. INITIALLY, IT CAME AS A REACTION AMONG MORE CONSERVATIVE, RURAL PEOPLE FRIGHTENED BY REVOLUTIONALLY CHANGES WHICH HAVE TAKEN PLACE IN QUEBEC SOCIETY IN PAST 15-20 YEARS. THEIR STRENGTH LIES MORE IN THE POPULARITY OF THEIR INDIVIDUAL CANDIDATES IN RURAL RIDINGS
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RATHER THAN THE POPULARITY OF THE PARTY ITSELF. NEVERTHELESS, WE FAIL TO SEE HOW THE CURRENT DISARRAY IN THE PARTY CAN DO ANYTHING BUT HURT IN THE NEXT ELECTION. ONLY POSSIBILITY WE SEE WOULD BE RECONSIDERATION BY ROY ENTER FEDERAL POLITICS. ONLY BASIS FOR SUCH SHIFT THAT WE CAN CONCEIVE OF IS ASSUMPTION BY ROY THAT NEXT GOVERNMENT LIKELY BE FORMED ON BASIS PARLIAMENTARY MINORITY. UNDER SUCH CONDITIONS, HE MIGHT ASSUME THAT LEADER OF SMALL SOCRED DELEGATION COULD ENJOY CONSIDERABLE POWER IN RETURN FOR SUPPORT GOVERNMENT FORMED BY MAJOR PARTY. PRESUMABLY, P.C. IN MINORITY MORE LIKELY LOOK TO SOCREDS THAN LIBERALS WHO INVITE NDP SUPPORT FOR THEIR LAST MINORITY GOVERNMENT IN 1922. MCNAMARA

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